CHRISTMAS NUMBER

The Inquirer

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WEAKNESS TOO

A CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

By W. J. Carter

EARLY in November I received a letter from a lady in Finland who thought I might be able to help her. She had been asked by the pastor of the Lutheran church she attends to give a talk on Christmas in other lands. She was chosen because, being an Esperantist, she was likely to be able to call on a number of foreign correspondents for help. She asked, in the first place, for details of the local customs observed in various countries. "We know," she said, "that Christmas is observed in countries not covered in snow and ice as ours is. We should like to be helped to form a picture of the way they do it". Next, she made the point that Christmas is kept by Christians of many kinds, and she asked for information about the special services we hold.

So far my correspondent was simply looking for picturesque details such as might be suitable for a popular magazine. But the question that interested me was of a deeper nature. Is it, she asked, due to the character of the Christmas message that it brings together in a common rejoicing people of different parts of the world and different religious traditions? If so, could that same message be used to enlist men and women of all nations and faiths in a crusade against the evils whose existence united them in a common fear?

What Could I Say?

I confess that I was impressed. The writer seemed to be uttering in her own way a longing that millions of people the world over are expressing, or merely feeling, in theirs. She appears to be an earnest Christian of a simple type, sure that her religion means something very precious, but sadly aware that it is in fact perpetuating and even emphasizing barriers between individuals and peoples which, if it really were the key to living, it ought to be breaking down. The original Christmas message was addressed to a few simple Jews, but was not its power as a gospel derived from the fact that it promised an end to their isolation as members of the one and only chosen people? I felt the seriousness of her questions. But there was so much in her attitude that conflicted with my own. What answer could I make?

At the time when her letter arrived the approach of Christmas was already making itself felt in one way. The time had not yet come to prepare for Christmas Services by decorating the church or looking out the books and sheets from which carols would be chosen. The Christmas sermons would not have to be worked out for some weeks. But already the shops were stocked and windows decorated. The churches were preoccupied by other occasions, but the invitations to the annual spending spree had been issued.

I had to point that out to my Finnish correspondent. For large members of people Christmas is much more a commercial than a religious event. Later on we might be reminded of a chorus of angels singing of glory to God and and peace on earth, but already we could not escape the chorus of salesmen and advertisers crying "Buy, buy". It would, of course, be easy to exaggerate the influence of modern salesmanship on the way Christmas is kept. The salesman can create a particular demand but only on the condition that he finds a general one already existing. But the general demand in question is only remotely connected with the Christian festival. The church did not invent Christmas; it largely adapted pagan festivals older than itself. Our Christmas heritage is a tradition of merry-making at least as much as of worship.

Natural Human Goodness

We are of puritan origin. Our history makes us inclined to disapprove of holy days. The religious feasts tend to become occasions for mere self-indulgence, while the fasts often substitute a ceremonial exercise of self-control for a moral one. Even the genuine goodwill that prompts us to organize gifts and parties for the aged, the infirm and the destitute may be combined with an acceptance of their misfortune as part of the natural order. But we liberals should be the last to complain when little acts, good in themselves, are done from motives not obviously religious. I remember being very shocked when serving on a panel with two Anglican clergy and a Catholic priest in an "Any Questions?" programme. Answering a question about the work of the United Nations for peace, both the Anglicans appeared to hold that peace could not be established, and should not be sought, except on a definitely Christian basis. The Catholic priest, on the other hand, recognized the value of natural human good-

ness. So we can rejoice in all the good in secular Christmas celebrations.

The Weakness of God

Yet we are a religious community. Whatever the importance we attach to human goodwill, for us its value is bound up with the other idea traditionally expressed in the words "Glory to God in the Highest".

We are often embarrassed when we join in the worship of other Christian bodies at Christmas, or use the beautiful stories and carols we share with them. We do not find in our own Christmas worship a celebration in terms of our own insights of the truth about the birth of our founder. But many of us do find something else though it is too personal and too elusive to be put into an agreed statement. For me it is something like this: We need an object for our worship. But what? Men have sought it in the forces of nature that are capable of destroying them, in the physical power of a human hero, in the power of a community concentrated in an ancient Caesar or a modern dictator. Power, certainly, there must be in God; but must there not be weakness too? To the power that threatens to overwhelm us we reply first with magic and then with science. But when God is represented to us as a little child, as a precious possession we may lose unless we let it possess us wholly, then we have no defence.

The historical Jesus remains as a teacher to whom we owe a great part of our notion of righteousness and love; but to the legendary babe of Bethlehem we owe an indispensable part of our understanding of God.

"MY FIRST CHRISTMAS"

By J. Glyn Pruce

(Mr. Glyn Pruce is just beginning his ministry at Hale Chapel, Hale Barns, Cheshire.)

CHRISTMAS is coming, the first Christmas of my first ministry, and nearly half a year gone—"on the job". A young man nowadays feels honour-bound to be realistic, tough-minded, and unsentimental. Of course, it would be sentimental and wildly exaggerated to take Jesus' life as the ideal of a ministry today. A nearer parallel might be Chaucer's "Poor Parson of a Town". Yet one has the nagging desire to be sentimental—the life of Jesus and my job, how near are they? I am certainly better off than he was in any ordinary material sense, but then I'm not married. That surely brings problems of its own, with a house and a garden to look after. How is the cooking and cleaning to be done? Why doesn't a cooker come with the house, and refuse bins and scrubbing-brushes? And where do floorcloths come from? I won't have any shirts left if I rip up any more to make swabs. But it's surprising how rapidly one adapts to the new situation and sensation of being a respectable householder, and it's amazing how people in the congregation are willing to do so much to help.

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Perhaps it's that word "respectable" that is the crux of the matter so far as "the job" is concerned. A student isn't respectable, and no one expects him to be. Finally after six or seven or eight years of adult student life, but without adult responsibilities and conventions, he moves into a niche in the community which is by strong tradition and binding convention eminently "respectable". The minister is responsible for the good name of the chapel and its congregation, for the prestige of the denomination. He must be mindful of the reputation for good solid, sound common sense and, yes, I'm afraid it's "respectability", built up in the community over possibly centuries. Unconsciously, imperceptibly, social pressures focus on him and begin to mould him into someone who "blesses" the *status quo*. Most of the time no one is aware of the process, or if they are regard it as the maturing of a "green sprig" into a "sturdy tree". Is it this, or is it really a process of knocking the stuffing out of the young parson? I wish I knew.

Of course, the whole of life is a compromise: how to meet the conflicting needs of young and old, and they *do* conflict, and not neglect any other age group? Most difficult of all: how far to go in helping those *outside* the church, who obviously really need help? Those whom the church will need to financially subsidize to some extent, and see no return for it and get no thanks for it, and yet keep on doing it because the *need is there*. But this means less time and care spent on those inside the church, and hard-earned church money spent, that can be ill afforded, on those that have no gratitude.

Some inside the church will undoubtedly resent it. It will be felt, if not said, that such activities lower the "tone" of the church.

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It's a foolish question to ask, but how did Jesus face and come to terms with such matters? Is there any parallel? Born in a manger (this *is* Christmas), friend of louts, prostitutes, publicans, sinners—and some eminent men: attached Pharisees, Sadducees, stickers to the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

Is this a moaning complaint and carping criticism of churches? No, it is not. It is a concern with the results of "establishment", with the results of "being accepted", and the "desire to be accepted".

There is a certain historical example brought home to me in college. The wandering Celtic monks in England were inefficient, ignorant, superstitious, but loved by all the people, pliable and eager to undertake missionary work. They had a wild and fiery, yet challenging, vision of the work of religion. The Latin church was all that the Celtic was not, and it succeeded in establishing itself and achieved dominance, but it had lost the fire and vision and love possessed by the Celts. Dare we lose the fire, the risk, the gamble, the total fling into the middle of things, and the devil take the consequences? I don't know, I just haven't been in the ministry long enough to be sure about any of these things.

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I suspect the "Poor Parson's" way was the best. To go about the job as one sees fit. To do the best, with God's help and in his sight, that one can. To strike the balance as fairly as possible. People are very good and helpful. They do want to do what is best and right. I came to the conclusion some years ago (and so surprised some of my friends), that there is more virtue, kindness, good intentions, and results, on balance, inside the church than outside it. So we should move steadily, if quietly, in the right direction—"onward and upwards" as the old slogan said. And it wasn't such a bad old slogan either. I'm looking forward to Christmas, and a good New Year.

Hibbert Houses

The Rev. G. J. Spurham, M.B.E., Director of Hibbert Houses, Middle East, has been "mentioned in despatches for distinguished service in Cyprus" (*London Gazette* of November 28, 1958). He is working indefatigably under very difficult conditions, and is urgently in need of further aid. Any person, man or woman, who is willing to go out to Cyprus and help him in his welfare work for the troops is asked to write to Mr. T. W. Blyth, 112 Gresham House, Old Broad Street, London, E.C.2.

Next Week

Mr. A. J. Long, in his "Faith and Understanding" series, will write on the Virgin Birth and the Christmas Story.

MY LIFE-LONG IMPRESSIONS OF THE MINISTRY

By Lawrence Redfern

IT is nearly forty-five years ago since I began my ministry in the glorious midsummer of 1914, a momentous year which moved on to a red autumn for Europe and the whole world. I had my dreams of the better days that were yet to be, when men had fought their way out of the dark forest of passion, and emerged upon some glittering plain where the skies are always blue and the days rich with labour and the nights secure in peace.

But in actual fact, it has been very different, and yet through all the stress and disappointment and sorrow of wars and rumours of wars, I have never wavered in the conviction, never so strong as in this evening of my day, that there is no task so sacred as to be the humble instrument whereby men and women are presented week by week before the throne of God, in prayer and praise and humble communion with the Eternal. Without that, nothing remains but a lost battle and the darkness of defeat.

It is no part of the ministry to speak lightly or to deprecate any secular approach to excellence, or to chill the enthusiasm of any good social or political purpose. "We could not praise a fugitive or cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed."

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But I affirm that it is nothing less than the worship of God that preserves and sustains the human ideal, that the root of all courageous and noble achievement lies in the profound feeling that the strife of the social and political purpose is only worth while because of the Eternal values implied in it.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is the second great Commandment. The first is "Thou shalt love God". The second is like unto the first, but it is still second. The Christian ministry, as I see it, should never lose sight of that priority. It is our sacred commission. It is not our primary purpose to harmonize our gospel with time, but to do a much bigger thing: to see the issues of time against a background of eternity; to bring the spiritual and the eternal persistently before the minds of our people. We do not get our licence to preach from the sociologies or psychologies of the passing day, nor should we lie with our ears to the ground listening for the last little bit of gossip that comes from them. In them reigns mutability, but we are primarily concerned with the abiding and the eternal. Whatever may be the solution of all the manifold problems which clamour for solution and make our lives so unrestful and full of dispeace, the foundation of God standeth sure and the things that cannot be shaken remain. A minister of religion must be both a troubler and a comforter. To be sure, he must bring comfort to his people. But there are times when it is wrong to be only a comforter. People need troubling, and the minister, as preacher, must trouble their drowsiness with his pure, high thought, and disturb them with truer conceptions of duty and charity. But the troubling must always come out of a noble faith and a heart of sympathy.

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A minister who is a critic and a croaker, a scorner and a sceptic, never really disturbs. He irritates, but does not disturb. He never gets to the heart of evil. His weapons are all too short. To be a troubler in the highest sense, he must have a firm grasp of eternal things, with God at the centre, the supreme thought, the supreme will, the supreme righteousness.

Under such guidance, men who are about to give up will take fresh courage. Those who would be silent will speak. Weak people trembling on the brink of disaster will draw back and seek another way. That is the reward and the blessing of the minister as a troubler and a comforter. And his commission must come to him direct from God. It is more than a tradition, however long and honourable. God may awaken it through tradition. But most important of all, God must awaken it by direct contact. It takes more than a mantle to make a prophet. He is made by direct contact with God, who gives him his large, brave outlook upon the world, his power to disturb and the blessed power to console. No minister in these days should be written off as a failure if he fails to fill his church. But he must not expect to be lightly judged if, by his folly and stupidity, he empties it.

I can only add just one more thing. As I look back over the years, I am convinced that in our ministerial life there must be a place for the doctrine of acceptance, a mellow wisdom that recognizes the inevitable when it comes. I do not mean supine inertia, nor passive surrender, nor sheer laziness. I mean a noble acceptance; without that, we break.

We must accept people as they are, "without one plea," in the faith that we can carry them step by step from their world to a higher. If we insist upon transporting them right away into a rarefied atmosphere to which they are not accustomed, they will die of suffocation.

The desire to come is everything, and we must make of that desire everything we can. It is the only way to endure to the end.

"God grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change: and the courage to change what I can: and the wisdom to know the difference."

A Prayer — Composed by A. Phillip Hewett

IN our prayer this day:

Let us seek to recall that insight which leads us down the vistas of the past, through the manifold experience of the present, and dares to thrust its gaze forward into the mists that veil the future;

Let us strive to see beyond the many to the one; that we may be imbued with a sense of the unity of all things going deep below all that separates and divides;

Let us remember our relations with our fellow men; our faltering attempts to live up to our ideals for ourselves; the times when we have succeeded and the times—alas, more frequent—when we have failed;

Let us consecrate ourselves anew to the service of the highest, soberly and realistically, neither reproaching ourselves for not attaining the unattainable, nor contenting ourselves with standards lower than those we could attain.

O Eternal, thy Spirit hath not changed its ways, nor hath the human heart forgotten its speechless longing for thy presence. Even as of old thy secret place is in the humble, contrite heart. Even as of old thy Spirit listeneth more to our hearts than to our lips. In this quiet hour and silent place come thou to us and touch our hearts with thine unutterable love.

AMEN.

NOT A GHOST STORY

By A Contributor

I HAD been down with the 'flu. But I did not want to put off my three days walking tour with Culverwell along the South Coast of Cornwall, and a week after Christmas we started off. The first day was wonderful. The weather soft and spring-like, and I felt my strength coming back. But on the second day, in the afternoon, a cold mist came off the sea, and we were caught in it and the darkness on a cliff path. We saw a light below and ahead of us, and Culverwell slowly edged forwards, with me clinging to his haversack. I was exhausted. He had to help me down the steep declivity to the light.

The mist was not so bad by the shore, and by the light coming from the cottage it seemed that we were in a deserted village. We went to the light and knocked on the door of the cottage. Some time passed before there was an answer and then the door was opened by the tallest man I had ever seen. Perhaps it was because of my condition, and the effect of the light of the room behind the man, and the narrow doorway in which the man stood that made him appear so

tall, but he had to bend down to speak to us. He was very polite and spoke in a cultivated voice. He did not seem in the least surprised to see us. And he was dressed in an extraordinary manner. The top of his body was covered by a brown cardigan much too short for him (a shirt underneath), and the rest of his body by riding breeches, also much too short. The waist just covered his hips. The legs of the breeches were unlaced, and he wore carpet slippers. In a polite manner he asked us inside, and made us take off our haversacks and sit before the fire. In the room he did not seem quite so tall, although his body had a permanent stoop as if acquired by his head always avoiding a ceiling. He was about sixty years of age.

He gave us a meal, a good one of ham and eggs, and said that we were to stay the night. He had a spare bedroom with two beds, old army beds left over from the war (how or why?) and he could provide us with mattresses and blankets.

After the meal he did so, and we were sitting down with him again after the preparations when there came a knocking from a room overhead. The man's polite, almost ingratiating, look turned at once to one of malevolence. The change was not strange, however, because there was always something queer about his look. But what he said next made the malevolent look queer and shocking. "My mother", he said. He turned his head from our stares and said, "She's eighty-nine. In bed. She's always knocking".

He tried to get his polite and smiling look back into place again, and almost succeeded, but something had disrupted in the room. Culverwell and I went to bed.

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The bedroom was bare, long and narrow, with one window at the end rattling in the wind. It was approached by six bare stairs from the living room, where we had been sitting. The door was a carpenter's rough job and was on a latch. There was no light in the room and we were provided with candles. For some reason or other the old man insisted, too, that we should have a wash-basin full of water to wash in. When we were washing I heard him standing on the top stair outside, wheezing and listening. He was not troubling to hide his wheezing from us or that he was listening. And in reply I stuck my knife into the latch of the door to let him know that we knew he was out there, and we were not going to be disturbed.

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True, I had been ill with the 'flu. I was exhausted, but had recovered adequately after the meal and the rest in the warm living room. I fell into a deep but troubled sleep. I had been asleep a long time, of that I am certain, when I thought I was suddenly wide awake. I had been awakened by knocking. To my petrified horror a phantom of the old man was in the room and was walking silently along it to the window. I could see him quite clearly in the starlight that now came from the window. I did not want to speak. I just watched him. He walked by our beds and paid not the slightest attention to us. He went to the window, put his hand up and then literally disappeared. I was sweating from head to foot. I tried to think that I had been sleeping, and I sat up and lit my candle. The room was empty. I forced myself out of bed without waking Culverwell and went to look at the door. The knife was still there wedged above the latch. I looked around the room. There was not another entrance anywhere. I went to the window; there was no exit there. I tried to think about the after-effects of influenza, and lay down in bed, and went to sleep again.

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I told Culverwell next morning of what happened. He went to the window to see what sort of morning it was. He can be very taciturn sometimes and he did not speak to me when he returned. I thought he was just shaking off what he thought to be a nightmare of mine, and of which I was making a fuss. He was silent during the breakfast (again of ham and eggs) and would not speak to the old man, but our host was jovial and ingratiating again. He hardly bothered to charge us anything for our stay, and when we gave him what we decided upon he did not even look at it.

It was a glorious morning when we left, but Culverwell was still very buttoned-up.

"What time did you wake up in the night?" he asked.

I told him.

"Did you get up after that?"

"No."

"Did you touch the window?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"The latch of the window was open this morning . . . I had closed it last night. . . . *Disappeared* you said."

I stumbled over a stone. "Yes, disappeared."

It could not be true, the morning looked so beautiful and sane.

Something was compelling me to look round at the cottage. I turned round. The old man was standing there just outside the door. I swear he was waiting for me to turn. He waved his hand particularly to me in a jovial, macabre way.

"Well," said Culverwell not having looked around, hitching up his haversack.

"Well," I repeated. And I was certain I had been wide awake.

THE TREE AND THE CHURCH

A New Church

The Unitarian congregation, Evanston, Chicago, entered into their new church in September of this year. The spectacular new church gives some idea of the vitality of the Unitarian advance in the U.S.A.

A PASTORAL VISIT

By a Minister

YES, thank goodness, despite surface appearances to the contrary, there is still a tremendous amount of courage and heroism to be found, often in the most unlikely and out of the way places.

For example, one elderly lady I visit from time to time is far from well, is hardly ever able to go out; when she does, it's only to the end of the street, and all her life has longed to be of service to others but has never had the opportunity. As a young woman she devoted herself to nursing her invalid mother who lived to a great age. Then, when her mother died and she had long since dismissed the idea of marriage, she met a gentleman who proposed to her and eventually married

her. But, alas, after only a short time he died and her health, which hadn't been too good for some time, grew steadily worse.

Ever since she was a girl she had dreamed of having a little thatched cottage in the country with a garden and trees that she could see from the window. But instead, her home is a rather drab little house in a dreary, Lancashire cobble-stoned street. Her living room is at the back and as she looks through the windows she sees, not trees and flowers, but a narrow yard, a high wall and beyond it roofs and chimney pots.

Yet she is always cheerful and over her mantelpiece there hangs a coloured picture of her "dream cottage". Now and then she gazes at it with a far-away look and then says confidently, "One day I'll have my cottage and my trees, I know I shall". In the meantime, she carries on, doing her best, listening to the problems and troubles of the numerous people of all ages who pop in to see her, making them all realize that when there is faith, love, and courage, nothing is impossible.

THE OLD BROWN BOOK

By Alastair Ross

IN July, 1820, John Keats published his third and last book of poems, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and other Poems*. A few days after the book appeared, his friend Haydon, the painter, wrote to him at his lodgings in Wesleyan Place, Kentish Town, to congratulate him, and added:

> "Have you done with Chapman's Homer? as I want it very badly at this moment; will you let the bearer have it, as well as let me know how you are?"

When I read these words a few days ago I was quite taken aback. At school, of course, we did "Keats", and *On first looking into Chapman's Homer* was in the *Golden Treasury*, so we could hardly avoid reading it. But the poem, and the other poems we "did", were just pieces of "Eng. Lit." No one actually wrote them; they just existed, and had always existed. One could not imagine that at a particular point of past time a real person, John Keats, had picked up an actual book, Chapman's translation of Homer, and had been so transported by what he had read that he had really felt, for a finite moment, "like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken".

Yet here was Haydon asking, "Have you done with Chapman's Homer?" So it was an actual book, and a borrowed copy at that (somehow that seemed to make it more actual still). As I pondered over the little incident of the borrowing of the book, trivial in itself, yet so important in its outcome, I found myself looking back over the books which had "spoken out loud and bold" in my own experience. Was there any single book, I asked myself, which had the same electrifying effect for me as Chapman's Homer had for Keats?

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Many people, I am sure, if they were asked a similar question could immediately point to a particular book (or sermon, or conversation) which had decisively affected the course of their lives. I remember, for instance, hearing a conscientious objector begin his evidence to a tribunal in 1940 with the words: "I was converted on July 23, 1933, at half-past two in the afternoon". I cannot point to any such once-for-all experience in my own life; my faith and my philosophy of life seem to have been built up imperceptibly, brick by brick, and not flung up in large prefabricated wings. So the other day, as I groped my way further and further back in time, past Kessler and Kafka to Eddington and Jeans, past Buchan and Wodehouse towards Lewis Carroll and Beatrix Potter, I began to feel that nowhere in my reading would I find one single book of which I could say: "*That book has meant more to me than any other*".

But all the time, at the back of my mind, I was thinking: "There really was such a book; if I can only search deeply enough in my memory, I must find it".

And I did find it. Physically speaking, the book itself perished, or was lost, when I was still a boy, but in imagination I can see it as though I were holding it in my hand. It is a collection of the parables of Jesus, illustrated with woodcuts by an artist whose name I do not now recall (could it be Millais?). It is quarto size, but not heavy, and can easily be handled by a child. The binding is brown, with elaborate Victorian ornamentation; if I could see the title-page, I imagine it would be dated about 1880. Each right-hand page contains the story of one parable, which is illustrated on the facing left-hand page. No commentary, no moralizing; just one picture and one story to each opening.

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But what pictures! And, therefore, what stories! Yes, I know, by adult standards, that is putting things the wrong way round. Grown-ups would say that it was the quality of the parables that inspired the artist to attempt to match them with his skill in drawing. But as a child I knew better than that. The stories were good because the pictures made them good.

It must be thirty years or more since I last saw those pictures. But I have only to close my eyes for a moment and the scenes and characters come to life again in their full drama. On one page is a villainous-looking man sowing seed (tares, of course) in a field on a dark night, and looking furtively over his shoulder. Next, I see the Samaritan tending the man who fell among thieves, while in the background the priest and the Levite proceed unconcernedly on their way with their noses in the air. On the following page, the unjust judge sneers cynically as the widow begs him to avenge her of her adversary. On another page, the proud Pharisee and humble publican are praying in the temple. And so on.

Three pictures stand out most vividly of all. Dives and Lazarus (especially the dogs!); the houses built on rock and sand, like little round igloos; and the man knocked up at midnight (by the neighbour who wants to borrow three loaves), glowering—very understandably—down from a window just above the front door. But every picture in the book had *life*, and the message it conveyed was urgent and important.

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For me, the parables have always been the central core of the teaching of Jesus, and my faith has been built round them. If it had not been for that old brown book, I doubt whether the parables would ever have rooted themselves so firmly in my consciousness; so firmly that whenever I read a parable now, or hear one read, the corresponding picture rises at once in my mind's eye.

Sometimes, when I am in a second-hand bookshop, I say: "I wonder if you have any late Victorian illustrated Parables of Jesus, quarto size, with woodcuts on the left-hand pages. By Millais, perhaps, or someone like that". But they never have. And, secretly, I am rather relieved.

Dunes

A desert is not altogether barren;
One does not expect to see there
Such fragile flowers as will stretch their silk
Over that sand; the water from the air
Perhaps they suck, or, maybe, waters seep
Up imperceptibly from an unknown deep.

I am glad to have seen them bloom, because
My desert so is less bare.
There must be some water since there are flowers.
Selfhood, though parched, is not despair;
In spite of sand, that round on round
Bewilders with its arid solitude.

MARGARET DUDLEY

Correspondence

Letters should be addressed to the Editor, "The Inquirer", 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C. 1. They should not in general exceed three to four hundred words in length.

Spiritualism

SIR,—The Rev. Arthur Long's condemnation of Spiritualism follows the usual lines—"fraud, hocus-pocus, credulity, irrationality," and the like—terms which are also freely used by hostile critics of conventional religion. Underlying such disparaging phraseology there may be detected an implied note of intellectual superiority; a feeling is subtly conveyed that there is something egoistic and unworthy in a concern as to the possibility of an after-life. It may be that some who do feel such a concern consider it irrational to assume without further inquiry that mortal life is just "a striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing" (Olive Schreiner).

There is an important issue involved in this matter that is not often enough considered. The great weakness of liberal religion is that it has become well-nigh impossible to discover any objective verification of its philosophy. Having rejected the objective authority of Church and Bible, it has never discovered a really adequate substitute, and it is left with vague references to an ill-defined religious "experience". To feel in a certain way is supposed to authenticate "spiritual truth", though no one is quite sure just what that phrase means or involves. The nineteenth century appeal to reason and conscience has been gravely weakened by more recent psychological and sociological research. Hence the confusion that marks liberal thought (in politics as well as in theology). A romantic hopefulness takes the place of assured conviction, and a vague sense that somehow the world is getting better and better becomes an attenuated substitute for a doctrine of human destiny. Some of us find it increasingly difficult to believe that the world is indeed getting better and better.

Any interest, seriously pursued, which seeks to push back the horizon of human significance and to thin the veil of sense perception is not to be lightly discounted, and I have known many Spiritualists of keen mental calibre who have been actuated by such motives, and who are completely outside the categories which Mr. Long enumerates. Perhaps the most egotistical and anthropocentric philosophical attitude is not that which is concerned about an after-life, but that which implicitly assumes that reality is exhausted by normal sense perception. If that were indeed so, there would appear to be no room for Theism in our philosophy, and we would be left with no alternative to scientific humanism.

We are living in a world in which the main human dynamic is the struggle for life and food and power. These are the values which actuate millions of lives today. Not until we can recover a strong faith in the objective validity of higher values will that dynamic be superseded by one more noble and less cruel than that which increasingly prevails today. Such validity would be greatly enhanced if we were assured of a continuance of the human ego in some further adventure of being beyond the boundaries of mortality.—Yours,

New Milton, Hants. *Herbert Crabtree.*

Unitarian Individualism

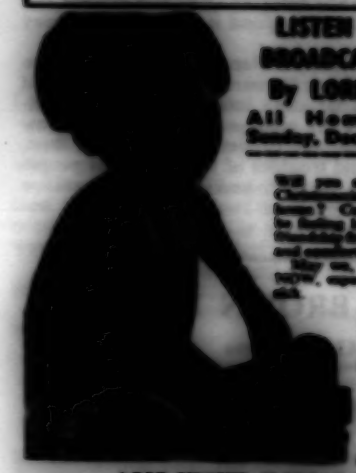
SIR,—It is high time someone wrote to support the Rev. Tom Wardle's spirited defence of Unitarian Individualism in your issue of November 29. Doubtless a centralized denomination with all funds pooled would suit "administrative convenience" and gratify "that enemy of mankind, the man with a tidy mind". But let us reject the pernicious doctrine of "the same for all", let us resist all attempts, social or denominational, to press us into one mould, let us be non-conformists and refuse to believe that "the gentlemen in Whitehall (or Essex Hall) know best" or that "Government (or the General Assembly) will pay" and that all we need to do is to discharge our rates and taxes (or subscribe to the Sustention Fund) and the experts will spend our money for us as they think best. Thus, free from individual responsibility, we—in the words of an advertisement—"won't even need to think"!

By all means let the stronger congregations help the weaker, but let us insist on keeping our diversity within the greater unity of the Free Christian Faith.—Yours,

Isleworth. *(Miss) K. Farewell Jones.*

HUNGRY ... COLD ... HOMELESS ...

HELP ME ... PLEASE



LISTEN TO B.B.C. BROADCAST APPEAL By LORD BIRKETT

All Home Services Sunday, Dec. 21st, 8.35 p.m.

Will you share your joy and happiness this Christmastide with those who will have no home? Complete refugees in every hands will be falling lonely and unwanted. A gesture of friendship from you will restore their hope, courage and confident vision.

Help us, in your name, give help to those refugees, especially the hungry, the cold and the sick.

10/- will feed an unfortunate refugee boy for one month.

£5 will provide and ship overseas 10 warm blankets.

Given the cost of a cracker will provide a good meal for 4 destitute Korean children.

Please send your generous donation to:

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OXFORD COMMITTEE FOR

FAMINE RELIEF

(Regd. War Charities Act, 1940)

SUPPORTERS INCLUDE:

The Rev. W. J. McLachlan, Rev. Sidney Spencer, Rev. H. R. Mosley (Chairman)

News Review

The Christmas Issues

In view of the diversity of the contributions to *The Inquirer* Christmas issues, it is worth recording that, with the exception of Mr. E. W. Martin's article, each contribution has come from a member of the Unitarian community.

RE-BUILDING AT GREAT HUCKLOW

The Children's Home at Great Hucklow, that well-loved eyesore of wood and corrugated iron which has rendered valiant service for more than half a century, may soon be no more. A few years ago it was planned to replace it with an imposing modern structure, but, alas, this was too ambitious, far beyond the means of the Northern Sunday School Federation and those who supported the Appeal Fund. Reluctantly the scheme was abandoned.

But now there are new moves afoot. At the Annual Meeting of the N.S.S.F. last Good Friday, it was decided to dispose of the Children's Home and its grounds and to provide alternative accommodation for children on other Homes' property. At the instruction of this meeting, sketch plans have now been drawn up for a new building on the Bakewells site.

It is now proposed to erect a two-storey block, connected to Bakewells by a covered way, with four separate dormitories of eight beds, each bed suitable for doubling up by sliding on an upper bed. This would give very flexible accommodation (one, two or three dormitories being allocated to girls or boys according to need) up to a maximum of sixty-four persons. Separate rooms are proposed for supervisors, together with adequate wardrobe, wash-hand, shower and heating facilities, and wardrobe accommodation by each bed. Meals would be served in Bakewells, reducing the number of kitchens at the Homes from three to two. The proposal, which includes the removal of the existing Children's Home, meets the requirements of the Peak Planning Authorities.

In accordance with a scheme (now before the Charity Commission) for uniting the several Homes under one Trust, it is be-

(Continued overleaf column, last page)

THE CALENDAR OF THE CHURCHES

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1958

[illegible], Unitarian Church, [illegible], 11 and 6, Rev. W. B. Tavener
[illegible], New Street Meeting House, 11, Rev. J. [illegible] Davies
[illegible], [illegible] Road Chapel, 11 and 6.30, Rev. A. W. Vallance
[illegible], Unitarian Church, [illegible] Road, 11.15 and 3, Rev. B. Gill
[illegible], Unitarian Chapel, [illegible] Road, 6.30, Supply
Bath, Trim Street Chapel, Unitarian, 11, Rev. [illegible]
Belfast, All Souls, [illegible] Avenue, 11.30 and 7, Dr. A. L. [illegible]
Belfast, First Church, Rosemary Street, 11.30 and 7, Dr. H. J. McLachlan Christmas Day, 11
[illegible], Unitarian Church, 11, Rev. W. Washington
[illegible], Free Church, High Street, 11, Mr. [illegible]
[illegible], Unitarian Church, [illegible] Road, 6.30 (December 28), Rev. [illegible]
[illegible], Church of Messiah, Broad Street, 11 and 6.30, Rev. Gordon Stuart Christmas Day, 11
[illegible], [illegible] Road Church, and [illegible] Street Mission, Small Heath, 6.30, Carol Service, Christmas Day, 11
[illegible], [illegible] Road, 10.45 and 6.30, Mr. E. A. West
[illegible], [illegible] Road, 11 and 6.30, Mr. Frank Lewis
[illegible], Bank Street, 2.30, Sunday School, 10.30, and 6.30, Rev. E. Shirvell Price Christmas Day, 11
[illegible], Unity Church, [illegible] Road, 10.30 and 6.30, Rev. Arthur J. Long
[illegible], Unitarian Chapel, [illegible] Lane, 6.30, Rev. Henry Hall
[illegible], Unitarian Church, [illegible] Road, 11, Rev. Lawrence Redfern
[illegible], [illegible] Avenue, 2.45, Pageant
[illegible], [illegible] Square, 10.45 and 6.30, Rev. Frank A. Bullock
[illegible], Christ Church, [illegible] Street, 3, Sunday School, 6.30, Rev. Wm. Mellor
[illegible], Unitarian Chapel, 11 and 6.30, Rev. G. [illegible] Jones

[illegible]

London, [illegible], West Ham Lane, Unitarian Church, 11.30, Children's Church, 6.30, Miss L. M. [illegible]
London, Wandsworth Unitarian Church, East Hill, 11, Rev. Arthur Peacock (also 6.30, 1st Sunday in the month), Christmas Day, 11
London, Welsh Unitarian Church at Highgate Hill Unitarian Church, 1st and 3rd Sundays, 6, Rev. T. L. Jones
London, Wood Green, Unity Church, Newnham Road, 6.30, Rev. E. G. Lee
Lytham St. Annes (Ansdell), Channing Road, 11 Rev. A. Williams
Macclesfield, King Edward Street, 10.45 and 6.30, Supply
[illegible], Unitarian Church, Market Buildings, 6.30, Mrs. Muriel Hilton
Manchester, [illegible] Unitarian Church, Chapel Lane, 6.30, Rev. David C. Dean
Manchester, Cross Street Chapel, 10.45 and 6.30, Dr. [illegible] W. Wiles
Manchester, Gorton, [illegible] Church, Hyde Road, 10.45 and 6.30, Rev. Maurice [illegible]
Manchester, [illegible] Church, Eccles, 10.45 and 6.30, Rev. W. Hill Waring
Manchester, Pendleton Unitarian, Cross Lane, 6.30, Rev. T. W. Roberts
Manchester, Platt Chapel, Rusholme, 6.30, Mr. Wm. McMillan
Manchester, [illegible] Street Mission, 6.30, Rev. B. L. Hopkins
Manchester, Stand Chapel, Whitefield (December 28), 10.45 and 6.30, Rev. Sydney H. Knight, Christmas Day, 11
Manchester, Wilbraham Road, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, 11, Mr. Philip M. Brown
Manchester, Wythenshawe, Unitarian Church, Brownley Road, Benchill, 6.30, Rev. John Gill
Mansfield, Old Meeting House, 10.45 and 6.30, Rev. Kenneth Sherratt
Marple, Unitarian Hall, 31 Stockport Road, 11 each Sunday
Middlesbrough, Free Christian Church, 6.30, Rev. E. A. Davies
[illegible], Old Road Chapel, 3.15, Rev. David C. Dean
[illegible], 3 and Newton Abbey, 6.30, Rev. C. G. Tucker
Newcastle-on-Tyne, The Church of the Divine Unity, Ellison Place, 11 and 6.30, Rev. John Storer
Newchurch (Rossendale), Bethlehem Unitarian Church, 2, Carol Service, 6, Musical Service
Northampton, Kettering Road Church, 11, Mr. A. W. Kerby
Norwich, Octagon Chapel, Colegate, 11, Rev. J. A. Kennedy
Nottingham, High Pavement Chapel, 10.45 and 6.30, Rev. C. Gordon Bolam, Christmas Day, 10.45

[illegible]

THE LINDSEY PRESS

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For your Christmas Carol Service you will find our eight-page hymn-sheet very useful. It contains twenty-eight hymns and carols, among them the following:

Christians, awake!; The first Nowell; Now the joyful Christmas morning; Silent Night; It came upon the midnight clear; Good Christian men, rejoice; I heard the bell on Christmas-day; As I kept watch beside my sheep.

If you do not know this hymn-sheet, please send for a specimen copy.

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THE INQUIRER

All letters and manuscripts for the Editor must reach the Office not later than Monday morning for publication the same week. All communications must be accompanied by the name and address of the sender.

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Those having any difficulty in obtaining copies of the paper should communicate direct with the publisher.

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TEL.: EUS. 7294 Editorial: EUS. 2942

Deaths

Hall—On December 10 at the Wyberton West Hospital, Boston, Elizabeth Ellen Hall, of 100 Frieston Road, Boston, aged 83 years.

Severs—On December 10, 1958, at St. Helens Hospital, Hastings, Sussex, aged 86, Mary, widow of Charles Severs (late of Lewes, Sussex), and mother of the late Carl Severs. Cremation on Thursday, December 18, 1958, at Hastings Crematorium at 3 p.m. No flowers by request.

THE DOMESTIC MISSION
Mill Street, Liverpool 8

RESTORATION APPEAL FOR CHAPEL

Final figures show that we are unexpectedly "only" just over £1,000 short on a £10,000 contract. Children, difficult youth, and needy old people, are at the heart of this work. Please help us to open on JANUARY 17 with the bills paid.
What better place this year for your Christmas collection, or for that or that unexpected balance?

Please send, before January 17, to:
A. R. ELLIS,
11 Fleetwore Road, Liverpool 18

Miscellaneous

Many Unitarians have been or are vegetarians. Information on this way of living, free from slaughter and its associations, gladly sent to others interested. Free literature on request from Secretary, London Vegetarian Society, 53 Marloes Road, Kensington, London, W.8.

Pulpit Vacancy

Swansea: Pulpit Vacancy. Stipend £500 per annum. Manse, rent and rates free (reviewed in twelve months). Applications to Miss E. M. Dando, 45 Pantycelyn Road, Townhill, Swansea.

Christmas Greetings

The Rev. Rosalind Lee and Miss H. E. Hargrove send Cordial Christmas and New Year Greetings to all their Unitarian friends.

Oxford Committee For Famine Relief

Lord Birkett is to give the B.B.C. "Week's Good Cause" appeal on behalf of the above Committee on December 21 at 8.25 p.m.

News Review—(*Continued from page 414*)

tended that this block would not be reserved exclusively for children, but that it may be used for young adults (and others) to whom such accommodation is acceptable on occasions when the full and efficient use of the Homes makes it desirable.

The anticipated cost, including amended drainage for the Barleycrofts' site and a new septic tank, but excluding beds and the necessary alterations to the Barleycrofts' dining-room and kitchen, is about £10,000. The value, on realization today, of the Grundy Home investments is about £8,500, and of the Children's Home Re-building Fund about £4,000.

Now that definite proposals, within the financial possibilities, are being laid before the Charity Commission, early permission to use the Grundy money is anticipated. As soon as this is given, only the approval of the Federation remains before building can commence. Therefore all constituent Schools and Unions are being asked to consider the proposal in readiness for a Special General Meeting of the Federation which it is hoped to call early next year.

Much committee work during recent years is beginning to bear fruit. Last year, the new Homes Management Committee was brought into being. This year the new post of voluntary Homes Secretary was filled by Mr. Geoffrey Waywell, and the new post of Warden by Mr. Henry Tittle. Perhaps next year we shall have our new Trust and — who knows? — our new building.

Brighton: Events for November-December at Christ Church (Unitarian), New Road, Brighton, have been happy and successful. On November 18 Mr. Anthony Brooke (formerly Rajah Muda of Sarawak) spoke on "Politics in a Christian Democracy". On Saturday, November 29, the annual Christmas Fair, organized by the Women's League, was opened by Mrs. Elsie Goring, of Ditchling, and, in spite of considerable competition from other events of that day in Brighton, produced a total of some £50 to add to Church Funds. On Sunday, December 7, there took place a highly successful Service of All Faiths (held with the co-operation of the World Congress of Faiths). The address, by Sir Henry Self, was on "Humanity as a Spiritual Family". Readings from the New Testament (by Mrs. Jean Gordon Smith, of the Brighton Congregational), from the Old Testament (by Mr. A. M. Fox, Minister of the Hove Liberal Synagogue), and from the Koran (by the Rev. John Rowland, in the absence of the board-for representative of the Woking Mosque) were found stimulating, and the evening was rounded off by a final prayer and benediction pronounced by the Rev. Basil Viney, the newly-appointed Minister at Lewes and Ditchling.

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